

**LISTING OF CLAIMS**

A listing of the claims is set forth below.

1. (Currently Amended) A stylet-free catheter insertion assembly , comprising:

a needle defining proximally a needle hub, distally a needle tip and a needle bore extending from said needle hub to said needle tip;

a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body connecting said proximal and distal ends, said catheter being sized ~~to be disposed within said needle bore such that the proximal end, distal end and body of the catheter may be passed through the needle;~~

said catheter body defining therealong a stiffening section of a predetermined length disposed a first predetermined distance proximally of said catheter distal end and a second predetermined distance distally of said catheter proximal end such that said stiffening section, when said catheter is disposed within said needle bore, is located adjacent the needle hub when said catheter distal end is adjacent the needle tip; and

said stiffening section having a flexural stiffness at least twice that of the remainder of said body.

2. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section has a length of about 5 cm.

3. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 2 wherein said stiffening section is disposed from about 10 cm to about 15 cm proximally of said catheter distal end.

4. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section extends from about 10 cm to about 15 cm proximally of said catheter distal end.

5. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section has a diameter not exceeding the diameter of the remainder of said body by more than about 0.15 mm.

6. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section is formed of plastic tubing and a cured adhesive extending circumferentially about said plastic tubing to provide a stiffening coating.

7. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating is non-tacky and wear-resistant.

8. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating has a thickness not exceeding about 0.08 mm.

9. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating extends in a substantially uniform thickness along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing.

10. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 6 wherein said stiffening coating reinforces said plastic tubing of said stiffening section.

11. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 6 wherein said cured adhesive is UV-cured.

12. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 11 wherein said cured adhesive is cured *in situ*.

13. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 6 wherein said cured adhesive is UV-cured *in situ*.

14. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 1 wherein said stiffening section is formed of plastic tubing and a plastic sleeve heat-shrunk about said plastic tubing to stiffen said plastic tubing.

15. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve is non-tacky and wear-resistant.

16. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve has a thickness not exceeding 0.008 cm.

17. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve extends in a substantially uniform thickness along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing.

18. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve reinforces said plastic tubing of said stiffening section.

19. (Previously Presented) The catheter insertion assembly of Claim 14 wherein said sleeve is polyethylene terephthalate (PET).

20. (Currently Amended) A catheter insertion assembly, comprising:  
a needle defining proximally a needle hub, distally a needle tip and a needle bore extending therebetween;  
a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body section connecting said proximal and distal ends, said catheter being sized ~~to be disposed within said needle bore such that the proximal end, distal end and body section of the catheter may be passed through the needle;~~

said catheter body defining therealong a stiffening section having a length of about 5 cm and a diameter not exceeding the diameter of the remainder of said catheter body by more than about 0.15 mm;

said stiffening section being disposed from about 10 cm to about 15 cm proximally of said catheter distal end and a predetermined distance distally of said catheter proximal end such that said stiffening section, when said catheter is disposed within said needle bore, is located generally adjacent the needle hub when said catheter distal end is generally adjacent the needle tip;

said stiffening section being formed of plastic tubing and an adhesive UV-cured *in situ* and extending circumferentially about said plastic tubing to provide a stiffening coating, said stiffening coating being non-tacky and wear-resistant and extending in a

substantially uniform thickness not exceeding 0.08 mm along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing to reinforce said stiffening section; and

said stiffening section having a flexural strength at least twice times that of the remainder of said body.

21. (Currently Amended) A catheter insertion assembly, comprising:

a needle defining proximally a needle hub, distally a needle tip and a needle bore extending between the needle hub and the needle tip;

a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body section connecting said proximal and distal ends, said catheter sized ~~to be disposed within said needle bore such that the proximal end, distal end and body section of the catheter may be passed completely through the needle;~~

said body defining therealong a stiffening section having a length of about 7 cm and a diameter not exceeding the diameter of the remainder of said catheter body by more than about 0.15 mm;

said stiffening section being disposed from about 10 cm to about 15 cm proximally of said catheter distal end and a predetermined distance distally of said catheter proximal end such that said stiffening section, when said catheter is disposed within said needle bore, is located generally adjacent the needle hub when said distal end is generally adjacent the needle tip;

said stiffening section being formed of plastic tubing and a plastic sleeve heat-shrunk about said plastic tubing to stiffen said plastic tubing; said sleeve being non-tacky and wear-resistant and extending in a substantially uniform thickness not exceeding about 0.08 mm along said stiffening section and about said plastic tubing to reinforce said stiffening section; and

    said stiffening section having a flexural strength at least twice that of the remainder of said body.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Cancelled)